

# Reno Evening Gazette.

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## LUCK IN A TUNNEL.

I am an old forty-nine California miner. I have been engaged in all descriptions of mining transactions, except the new fangled one of mining stock in companies—"feet," I believe they call it. Among my varied undertakings was one operation in a tunnel, in which I and my partner engaged in the summer of 1853.

One afternoon in that year, as I was carrying up a bucket of water from the river to our tent at the top of the bank, my foot caught under a large stone, and my perpendicular posture, while the water from the overturned bucket spread itself in various directions. With a few expletives of rather a forcible character, quite customary in that region and period, I raised myself to my feet again, and picking up the bucket, was about to retrace my steps to the river when my attention was attracted by a folded paper, which had been placed under the stone which caused my fall. When my foot tripped, the stone was overturned, and the paper, folded in letter form, lay exposed to view. Bending over I picked it up, and proceeded to examine it. It was written in pencil, in characters very irregular and stiffly formed, as if made by a person with a wounded hand. The contents were as follows:

"If this letter should fall into the hands of any person, I wish to inform him that I have been attacked and mortally wounded by my two partners, who wish to obtain my money. Failing to discover it after wounding me, they have fled, leaving me here to die. Whoever gets this letter will find, buried in a ravine at the foot of a 'blazed' tree, twenty-five pieces of gold, and a bag containing five thousand dollars in gold dust. That it may prove more fortunate property to him than it has to me, is the wish of

ANDREW FOREST."

I stood for some moments after reading the letter, like one awakened from a dream. I could not convince myself that the letter in my hand was genuine, and I read it over and over again, thinking I might get some clew from the handwriting to the real author. It might be a trick got up by my partners to raise a laugh at my expense. No; the place where it was found, and the purely accidental discovery, rendered such a surmise very improbable. I sat down on a log, and turned the matter over and over in my mind for some time. At last I got up, and pacing off the required distance in the direction mentioned in the letter, I came to a large tree. Carefully examining it, I discovered a scar, clearly indicating that the tree had been "blazed" at some remote period. This was "confirmation strong as Holy Writ," and I immediately went to work to discover the locality of the ravine. Here I was at fault. Nothing of the kind was to be seen. To all appearance, a stream of water never had passed in the neighborhood of the tree. This was not encouraging, and I sat down on the ground and read the letter again, to see if I had not mistaken some of its directions. No; I was in the right place; but where was the ravine?

A tap on my shoulder aroused me from my meditations, and, looking up, I saw my two partners, who loudly abused me for having neglected the preparation of their supper. As an excuse, I showed them the letter, and detailed the manner of my finding it. To my surprise, they were as much excited by its perusal as I had been, and we all looked around perseveringly for the ravine, but without effect for some time. At last Jack Nesbit, who had been a miner since '48, said:

"I think there has been a ravine here but it has been filled up by the rains."

On close examination we decided that his supposition was correct, and after some consultation we determined to commence digging early the following morning.

Morning came, and we repaired to the spot with pick and shovel. Jack proposed that we should follow the course of the ravine, which appeared to run along the body of the hill, rather than to dig down; for as he said, we would be more likely to find the bag in the bed of the ravine, by following it up, than by digging down in one place. The result was that in a few days we had formed quite a cave in the side of the hill.

We worked at this tunnel for four days without finding the bag. On the fourth day Jack proposed that he and my other partner, Bill Jennings, should carry the dirt we had excavated down to the river, and wash it, leaving me to dig in the tunnel. In that way, they thought, they might "make grub," while searching for the hidden money. I thought the idea foolish, but as they entered so eagerly into my views concerning the buried treasure, I made no objection to the plan, and dug away with redoubled energy. In fact, I had thought so much about the object of our search, that I had become utterly regardless of almost everything else. I had dreamed of it when sleeping, and it had occupied complete control of my mind. Day after day we worked—I digging, and my companions washing; yet, strange to say, I did not become discouraged. They said nothing about the bag of gold dust, and I asked them nothing about the result of their washing the excavated soil.

We had worked about three weeks, and had formed a tunnel extending about fifteen feet into the hill, when,

one afternoon, completely tired out, I sat down to rest in the cave. I had only intended to sit a little while, but five minutes had not elapsed before I was sound asleep. I was awakened by a crash, and found my feet and legs completely covered by a mass of dirt and stones. The front part of the tunnel had fallen in, and I was in a manner buried alive. About ten feet of the tunnel remained firm, and from my observation of the structure prior to the accident, I was convinced that I had no reason to apprehend any danger from that quarter. My partners had carried dirt enough to the river to keep them busy for the rest of the day; so I had nothing to hope from their assistance. The question that first presented itself to my mind was, how long can life be sustained in this confined state? I had read a dozen times, statistics in relation to the amount of air consumed hourly by human beings' lungs, but, like almost everybody else, had merely wondered at the time and then forgotten the figures.

How much I would have given then to be able to recall them! The next thought was, how can I proceed to extract myself? This question was difficult of solution. If I went to work with shovel and pick to clear away the dirt that had fallen, it was very likely that all I should be able to remove would be immediately replaced by that which would fall in from above. This was pleasant! I racked my poor brain to devise some means of liberating myself, but without effect.

Leaning against the wall in utter despondency, I was about to throw myself down on the ground and wait my fate, when I observed that quite a current of water, on a small scale, was making its way down the side of the cave. At first I was alarmed, as I thought it might loosen the earth above, and bring another mass down on my head. The next moment the thought struck me that it might be turned to my advantage. Why could I not direct it so that it would wash away sufficient earth in its progress to the outlet of the cave to make an opening large enough to allow me to crawl through it? Even if I only succeeded in making an air hole, it would enable me at least to exist until my partners could come to my rescue.

Carefully examining the course of the water, I succeeded in finding the spot where it entered the cave, and to my great joy ascertained that I could easily direct it, by cutting a channel out of the sides of my prison to the mass of earth that blocked up the entrance to the tunnel.

The air at this time was quite hot and stifling, and I became aware that whatever was done must be done quickly, or I should perish for want of oxygen.

After cutting a channel for the water to flow toward the entrance, I enlarged the opening by which the stream entered the cave, and rejoiced to perceive that it flowed with redoubled force. Taking my shovel I pushed it through the moistened earth as far as I was able, and then awaited the further action of the water. In a few minutes I could push it further, till at last it was out of my reach. Then placing the pick handle against it, I pushed both as far as I could. With what eagerness did I watch to see the first opening made by the water, but I was soon gratified to observe that it flowed in a steady stream in the direction in which I pushed the pick and shovel.

In a few minutes I discovered a faint glimmering in the distance, which might be an opening, or the effect of an excited imagination. I scarcely knew which. But the doubt soon resolved itself into a certainty, and an opening, some five inches in diameter, speedily disclosed itself.

Larger and larger the opening grew; lump after lump of earth was washed away by the stream, till the channel became large enough to place my head in and call lustily for assistance.

Just as I was drawing my head back, I caught sight of a buckskin bag. Hastily seizing it I found it was the one we were in search of, and which, but for the accident, I never would have found. Wishing to surprise my companions, I concealed it, and redoubled my cries. In a few minutes they came running up the hill, and soon liberated me from my unpleasant position.

"Well Ned," said Jack, as he shook my hand, "I am glad to see you're safe, old fellow; the more so as Bill and I have been deceiving you a little. You know we have been trying all the summer to get you into a tunneling operation, and you have only laughed at us."

"Yes," I said.

"Well, when you got that letter, we knew you would work twice as hard with such an inducement, intending, meanwhile, to wash the excavated dirt. This we have done; and, my boy, we have not made less than three hundred dollars any day since we began."

"Then you think the bag a humbug, do you?" I asked.

"Of course," said he.

"Well, I don't, and intend going on looking for it," said I.

"Now what is the use of being foolish?" quoth Bill Jennings. "We have got as much dirt as we can wash for some time, and it pays. I can't see the use of continuing such a wild goose chase as the hunt for that bag."

"Be that as it may," said I, "I intend to follow it up."

"Well, Ned, we may as well tell you first as last. I wrote that letter

in order to get you to go into tunneling."

"And the 'blazed tree,'" said I, "how about that? The 'blaze' is certainly two years old."

Jack hesitated.

"Why, you see," said he, "we found that tree and wrote the letter to suit it."

"Then what do you think of this?" I asked, showing him the bag I had found in the cave.

Jack was nonplussed. On opening the bag we found about three thousand dollars' worth of gold. Jack would never confess, but always insisted, that the variance between the statement in the letter and the amount in the bag was proof enough that there was no connection between the two. I don't think so, however, and I believe that Jack's assertion of having written the letter was untrue. We could never ascertain anything about Mr. Forest, so we divided the money among us.

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